

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



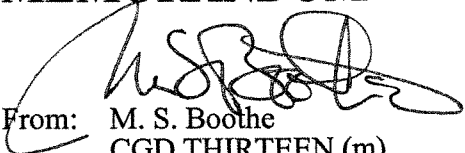
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16671

14 May 2004

## MEMORANDUM

From:   
M. S. Boothe  
CGD THIRTEEN (m)

Reply To: D13 (mc)  
Attn of: LCDR Kane

To: R. Jones, Lead Investigator  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD (NTSB), OFFICE OF MARINE  
SAFETY

Subj: DEFINITION OF "SMALL BOAT"

Ref: (a) 2003 U.S. Coast Pilot 7

1. I am writing in response to your recent request for a U.S. Coast Guard definition of the term "small boat" as used in the context of the U.S. Coast Pilot when describing coastal river entrance advisory signs. The United States Coast Guard did not define "small boat" when it provided information regarding the "Tillamook Bay Entrance Small Boat Warning Sign" to NOAA for publication in the U.S. Coast Pilot. Rather, the term small boat, as used in this title, is an undefined, general term with no legal or regulatory background. This term is widely understood by the public, as such, in this context. It was intended to convey that when illuminated, weather conditions could be adverse to the safe operations of smaller vessels.

2. There are many terms used in the U.S. Coast Pilot that are not defined because the U.S. Coast Pilot is not intended to be, nor is it commonly understood as, the source of public knowledge for applicable laws or regulations. The U.S. Coast Pilot is intended to convey general navigation safety, port and waterway information to vessel operators who transit the covered area. The U.S. Coast Pilot refers to the rough bar advisory sign posted at the entrance to Tillamook Bay as a "small boat warning sign." Yet the sign itself, includes no such nomenclature. Rather, it only displays the words "Rough Bar" in black letters across a white, diamond-shaped background with an orange border, and two yellow lights, which are activated under prescribed weather conditions. Further, the U.S. Coast Pilot cautions mariners that the absence of flashing lights does not mean that sea conditions are necessarily favorable.

3. It is common knowledge in the marine environment, that smaller craft are generally more susceptible to heavy weather and sea conditions than larger craft. The Tillamook Bay Entrance "Rough Bar" advisory sign advises mariners that when the two quick-flashing yellow lights are activated, the wave height exceeds four feet, and that conditions are considered hazardous for small boats. The activation of the sign does not, in and of itself, prohibit boat operations. As noted previously, the sea conditions may also be unfavorable when the lights are not activated. Similarly, the National Weather Service does not define the term "small craft" in its weather advisories. A "Small Craft Advisory" is issued for winds 18-33 knots and/or average waves of

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four feet or higher nearshore waters. Small Craft Advisories may also be issued for hazardous sea conditions or lower wind speeds. Again, these advisories are cautionary notices for smaller craft to be alert to hazardous weather conditions.

4. The rough bar warning signs convey potentially dangerous conditions to the owners and operators of smaller boats that navigate in the area. The Coast Pilot is not intended, nor can it reasonably be interpreted, as communicating in a definitional sense what size boats should or should not navigate a specific area as a legal matter. USCG regulations spell out the conditions under which the District Commander or his delegate may suspend operations in a specific area due to hazardous weather conditions. Absent a specific order/restriction from the USCG, mariners are expected to exercise due diligence in the operation of their vessels. Licensed operators are in the best position to know the capabilities of their boats. For legal requirements, the public is obligated to consult the United States Code and the Code of Federal Regulations.

5. If you need additional information or assistance, my point of contact is LCDR Daniel Kane at (206) 220-7224.

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